A PECULIAR MANUSCRIPT OF THE QUR'ĀN IN THE GRONINGEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Fred Leemhuis

In the Groningen University Library a manuscript codex with portions of the Arabic text of the Qur'ān is kept. I saw the manuscript years ago, but did not really know what to make of it. Notwithstanding its antiquity, something irritated me, but I could not put my finger on what exactly it was that irritated me, apart from the script, which seemed out of place. However, I got a printout of the microfilm—it was still before digital photography—and looked at it from time to time. This manuscript, ukluHANDS 468,[1] has 75 paper folios that measure 31,5 × 20,5 cm. The two portions of the Qur'ān this manuscript contains are from different hands. This was already remarked by the famous Groningen Orientalist Nicolas Schroeder (1721–1798)[2] in a Latin note on the flyleaf before the first folio at the beginning of the book, i.e. the beginning as in an Arabic book. The larger part of the codex is written in a Maghribi or, as Schroeder puts it, Mauritanian type of hand which does not look very old. According to a note in German on the back of Schroeder's note this fragment was acquired in 1535 by Johannes Marquart von Kungbeck at the seizure of Tunis by Charles the Fifth.[3]

The second and smaller part on folio 55r (Fig. 1) until 71r is, as Schroeder already noted, a fragment of the Qur'ān written in very old letters which are called Kufic. Indeed, although this script is not executed very carefully, it shows the well-known characteristic of early Qur'āns: "It is written in groups of connected letters separated by spaces."[4] This type of script, however, is normally associated with

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[1] I should like to express my gratitude to Mrs. Gerda C. Huisman, head of the Special Collections Department of the Groningen University Library for her information and cooperation.

[2] See Nicolaus Wilhelm Schroeder, in: *Digitale bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse letteren* on http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/molh003nieu09_01/molh003nieu09_01_1664.htm.

[3] See Robert Jones, "Piracy, war and the acquisition of Arabic manuscripts in Renaissance Europe", *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, vol. 2, 1987, 99, 100, 107.

[4] E. Whelan, "Writing the word of God: Some early Qur'ān manuscripts and their milieux", *Ars Orientalis*, vol. 20, 1990, 114.

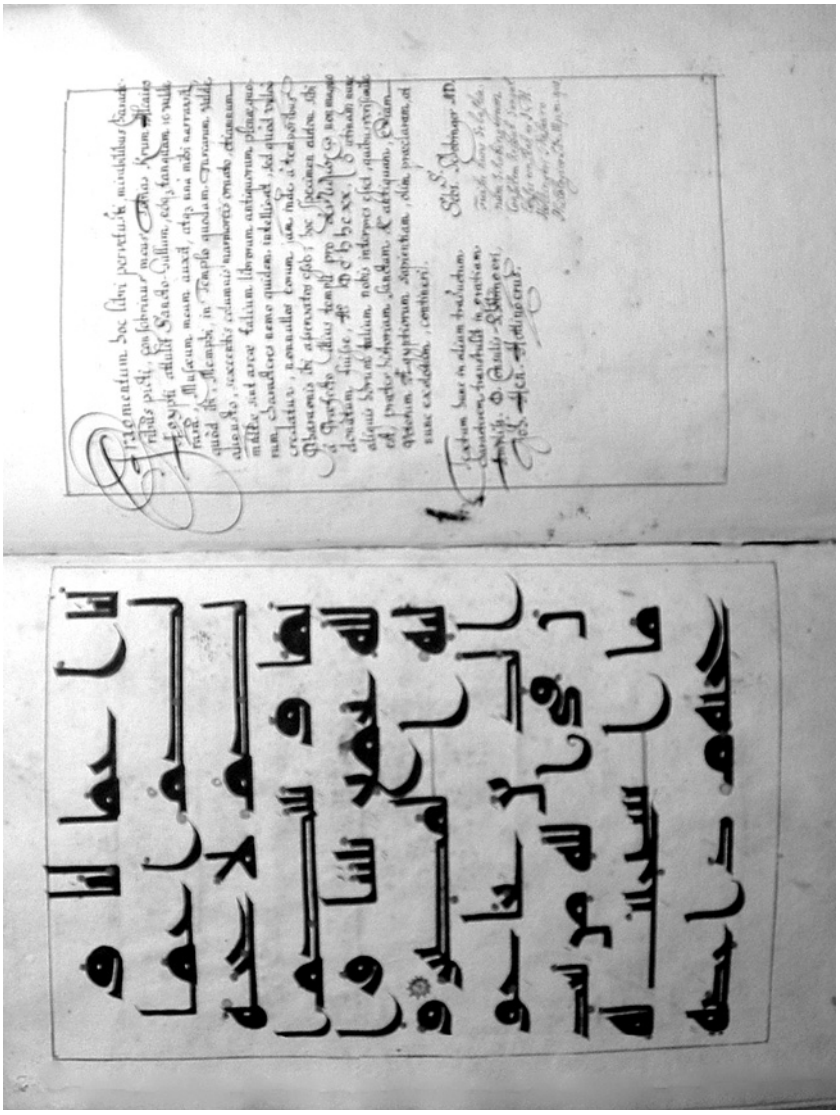

Fig. 1. Folio 56r of ukluHANDS 468 and the preceding Latin introduction.

copies of the Qurʾān written on parchment before the second half of the 3rd/9th century, after which it was gradually replaced by paper.[5] Schroeder's opinion was that both manuscripts were copies of old manuscripts, but he does not mention why he thought so. Did he also note the anomaly of the very old letters on paper rather than on parchment?

A Latin note (Fig. 2) states that this part of the codex was acquired in Cairo in 1620 and brought to Saint Gall by a certain Tobias Krum to his cousin, the town physician and mayor Sebastian Schobinger (1579–1652).[6] It was believed that the very old book with curious characters contained old Egyptian wisdom. The famous scholar Johann Heinrich Hottinger (1620–1667),[7] who studied in Groningen, later added a few pages, folios 72v to 75v, for a transcription of the text into a contemporary Orientalist Arabic script and a translation into Latin, thereby identifying it as a fragment of the Qurʾān. The text of the fragment starts with *Sūrat al-shūrá* (42) with the words *lanā aʿmālunā wa-lakum aʿmālukum* of verse 15 and it ends with the words *thumma tadhkurū niʿmata* of *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (43) verse 13, leaving the rest of the page blank. Hottinger, however, only transcribed the text until *Sūrat al-shūrá* (42) verse 47 *min qabli an yaʾtiya yawmun* and he translated even less, up to verse 38.

Although the part that was transcribed by Hottinger starts with the same words as the curious manuscript, it is clear that Hottinger simply copied from another Qurʾān. Moreover, apparently he was either in haste or was not yet very versed in reading Arabic. The manuscript deviates from the textus receptus of the Qurʾān in a few places, but two longer text fragments are quite misplaced. The words *lafī ḍalālin* of *Sūrat al-shūrá* (42) verse 18 on folio 57r are immediately followed by *kān yurīdu ḥaratha* of verse 20 and the whole part that was omitted there follows on 58r after *min al-dīni mā lam* of verse 21, after which the text simply continues with *yaʾdhan* (Figs. 3–4). Something similar happens at verse 45. After *yanẓurūna min ṭarafin* on 65v the text

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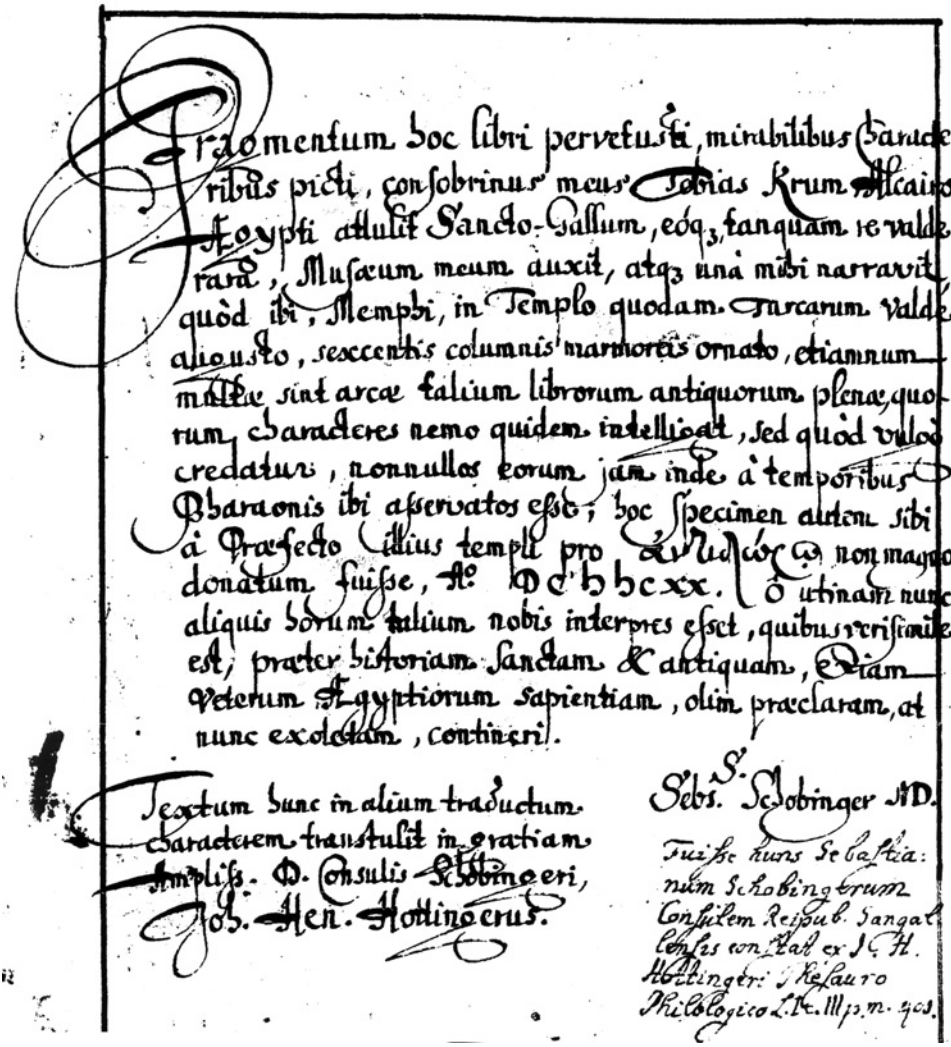
[5] S. S. Blair, "Transcribing God's Word: Qurʾān codices in context", *Journal of Qurʾānic studies*, vol. 11, 2008, 82.

[6] See e.g. Rudolf Gamper & Wolfgang Göldi,*Vom Bücherlegat des Humanisten Vadian zur Kantonsbibliothek (Vadiana) St. Gallen: Ein bibliotheksgeschichtlicher Streifzug.* PDF file "Geschichte Kantonsbibliothek Vadiana" on www.sg.ch/home/kultur/kantonsbibliothek/spezialabteilungen/vadianische_sammlung.html.

[7] For his life and work see F. Büsser, "Johann Heinrich Hottinger und der 'Thesaurus Hottingerianus'", *Zwingliana*, vol. 22, 1995, 85–108. For a short sketch see e.g. http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/HOR_I25/HOTTINGER_JOHANN_HEINRICH_162o1.html.


Fragmentum hoc libri pervetusti, mirabilibus characteribus picti, consobrinus meus Tobias Krumm Alcairo Aegypti attulit Sancto-Gallum, eóq; tanquam re valde rara, Musæum meum auxit, atq; una mihi narravit quòd ibi, Memphi, in Templo quodam Turcarum valde augusto, sexcentis columnis marmoreis ornato, etiamnum multæ siat arcæ talium librorum antiquorum plenæ, quorum characteres nemo quidem intelligat, sed quòd vulgò credatur, nonnullos eorum jam inde à temporibus Pharaonis ibi asservatos esse; hoc specimen autem sibi à Præfecto illius templi pro aureo quodam non magno donatum fuisse, Ao DCIIIcxx. O utinam nunc aliquis horum talium nobis interpres esset, quibus verisimile est, præter historiam sanctam & antiquam, etiam veterum Aegyptiorum sapientiam, olim præclaram, at nunc exoletam, contineri.

Textum hunc in alium traductum characterem transtulit in gratiam Amplis. D. Consulis Schobingeri, Joh. Hen. Hottingerus.

Sebs. Schobinger JD.

Fuisse hunc Sebastianum Schobingerum Consulem Reipub. Sangallensis constat ex J. H. Hottingeri Thesauro Philologico L. I. c. III. p. m. 405.

Fig. 2. The Latin introduction.

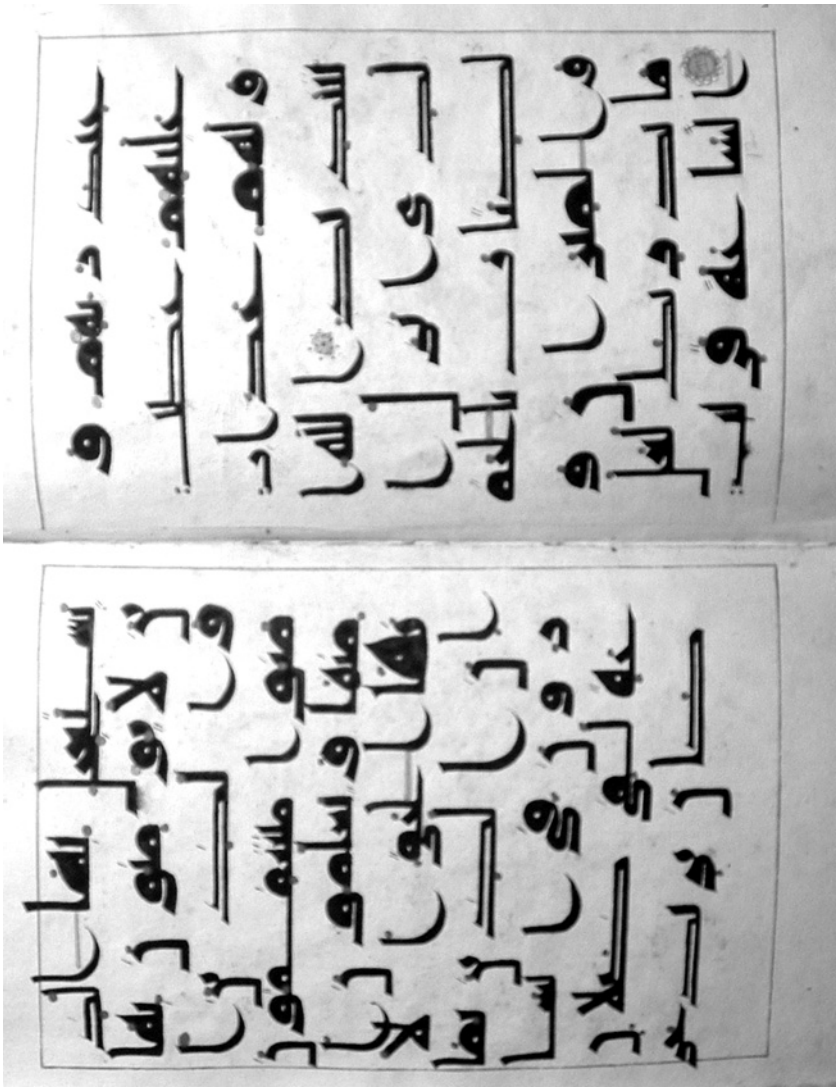


Fig. 3. Folios 56v and 57r.

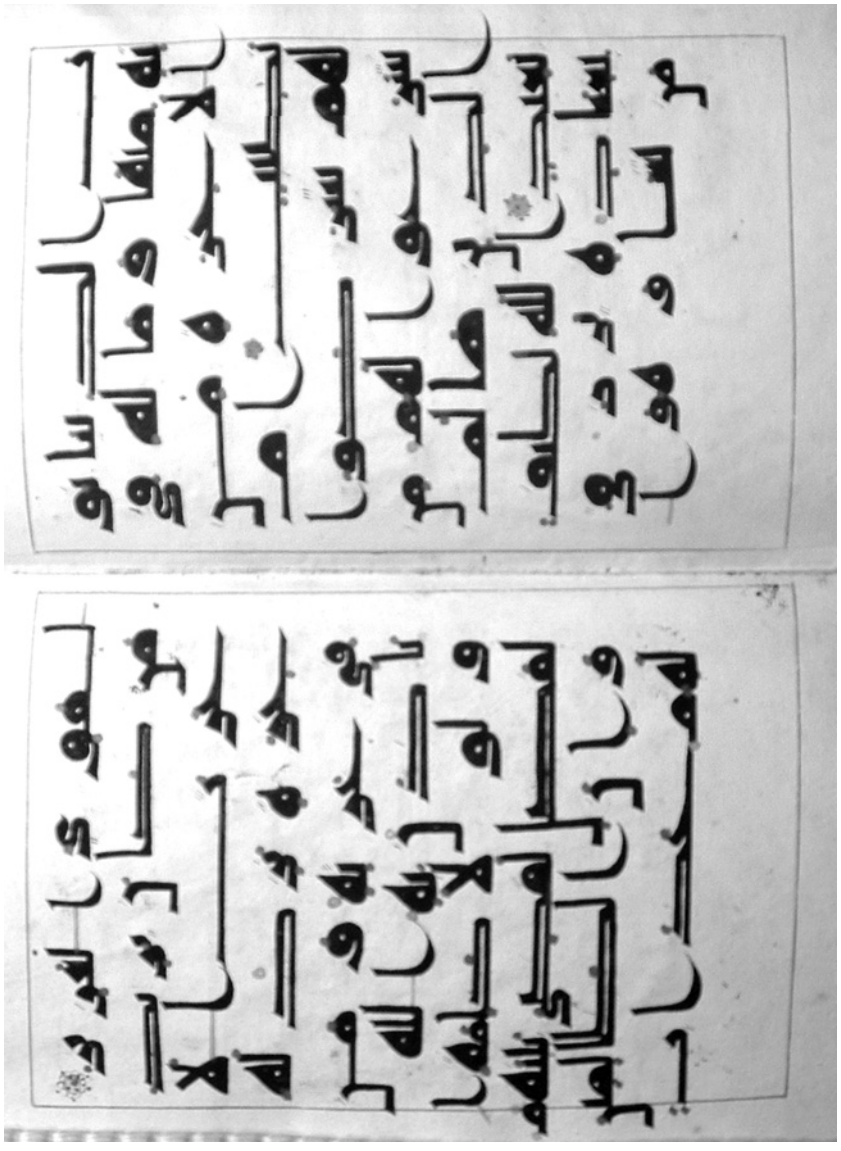


Fig. 4. Folios 57v and 58r.

continues with the last three words of verse 47 *mā lakum min nakīrin* and the beginning of verse 48 but after *fariḥa bihā* the sequence *ūna min ṭarafin* is repeated on 66r and then the rest of verse 45 follows. The text then continues till *mā lakum min maljaʾin yawmaʾidhin wa* of verse 47, where then the words (*mā lakum min nakīrin*.... after *fariḥa bihā*) that were written too soon are simply skipped. The text then continues on 67r with *waʾin tuṣibhum sayyiʾatun* and follows the normal order of the textus receptus.

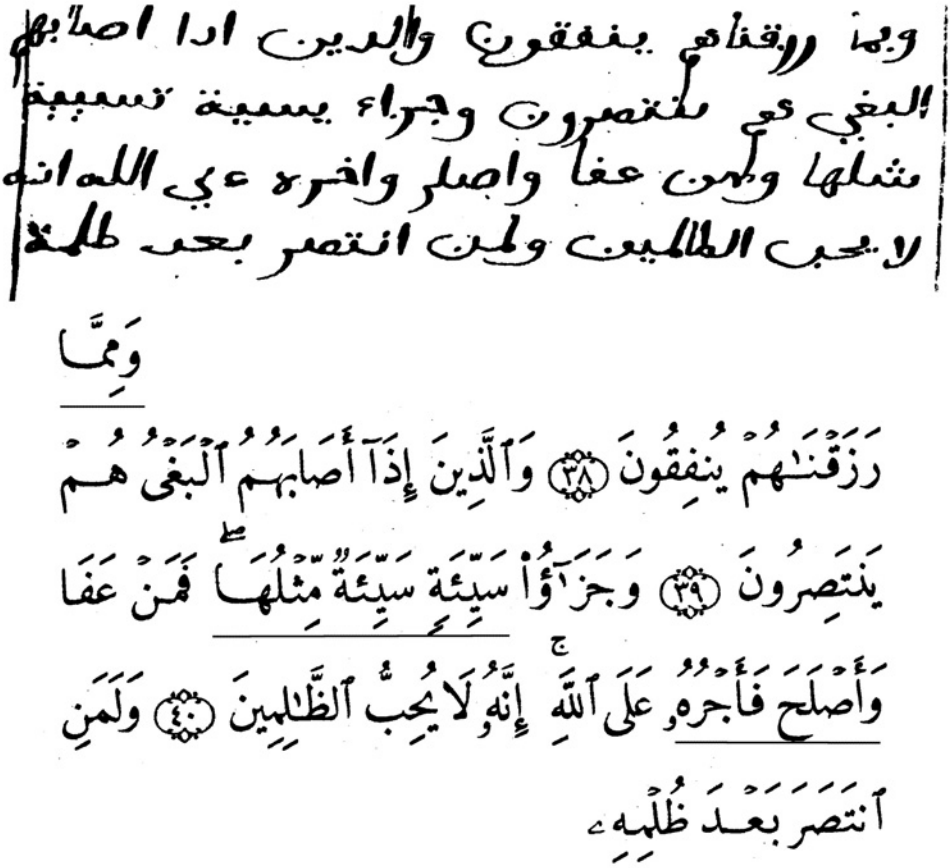
Hottinger's transcription in just giving the order of the textus receptus does not betray that he has seen these misplacements. However, he clearly has seen the text, as is witnessed by the written remarks *linea haec superflua* at the dittography of *mā qaniṭū wa* on folio 61r of the manuscript in *Sūrat al-shūrá* (42) verse 28 and at the redundant *ūna min ṭarafin* of verse 44 on folio 65v. Although it would appear that Hottinger copied the text from another copy of the Qurʾān, it is curious that he omits sometimes a word or more. After the last occurrence of *Allāh* at the end of the *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (43) verse 23 all is omitted until after the first occurrence of *Allāh* in verse 24 and the text continues with *kadhiban*. It is not too farfetched to suspect that the length of the lines in the copy of the Qurʾān that Hottinger used was just the length of the omitted part. Moreover, quite a few mistakes stand out. To give but one example, *Sūrat al-shūrā* (42) verses 38 to 40 are copied rather inaccurately as Fig. 5 shows. All in all, it looks very much as if Hottinger had copied the fragment rather hastily.

Hottinger's Latin translation appears to be more or less faithful. It breathes much more the spirit of Marracci's translation,[8] which he could not have known, than that of Robert of Ketton, which he must have known in Bibliander's version.[9]

Interesting as all this may be, it does not make the manuscript in question less peculiar. Apart from the two above-mentioned misplacements of text there are some other peculiarities. In the first place, the manuscript shows many more *plene* spellings than one would normally expect with this type of script. It shows *alif*s to indicate length 44 times

[8] It was published in 1698 together with the Arabic text. The 1721 Leipzig edition of Marracci's translation is now available in facsimile on the internet: www.google.nl/books?id=Jg4–AAAAcAAJ.

[9] *Machumetis Saracenorum principis eiusque successorum vitae ac doctrina ipseque Alcoran quae…quae ante annos CCCC…Petrus abbas Cluniacensis…ex Arabica lingua in Latinam transferri curavit*, Basileae: Ioannes Oporinus, 1543.



وَمِمَّا
رَزَقْنَٰهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾ وَٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَابَهُمُ ٱلْبَغْىُ هُمْ
يَنتَصِرُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَجَزَٰٓؤُا۟ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِّثْلُهَا ۖ فَمَنْ عَفَا
وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُۥ عَلَى ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَا يُحِبُّ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾ وَلَمَنِ
ٱنتَصَرَ بَعْدَ ظُلْمِهِۦ

Fig. 5. Part of *Sūrat al-shūrā* (42) verses 38 to 40 according to Hottinger's copy (above) and the Egyptian government edition of 1923 (below). The differences are underlined.

more than the corresponding text of the Egyptian government edition of 1923. In one case, i.e. *wa-maḍā* in verse 8 of *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* (43) writing the word with *alif mamdūda* instead of *alif maqṣūra* is more in line with what one would expect with the sort of script, whereas the multitude of plene spellings seems oddly out of place. Apart from these extra *alif*s there are also a few mistakes. In *Sūrat al-Shūrā* (42) verse 15 we find *bimā* in stead of *baynanā* and the placing of *Sūrat al-Zukhruf thamānūn wa-tisʿa* between the *wāw* and the *rāʾ* of the last word of sura 42 is rather odd.

Nevertheless, the misplacement of the two longer pieces of text mentioned above remained a real puzzle for a long time. After having seen over the years quite a large number of photographs of early Qurʾānic manuscripts, I think I may venture a solution to this strange phenomenon. From the dittography of *mā qaniṭū wa* in *Sūrat al-shūrā* (42) verse 28 it appears that the Groningen manuscript could very well have been copied from another manuscript. If this was the case, the curious misplacements of text could be easily explained, because the amounts of text that appear in the wrong places and are omitted at their right places are about the amount of text one would expect on a page of a five line codex of the type which Estelle Whelan calls the Group 1 manuscripts.[10]

The first missing fragment of text would have looked somewhat like the simulated folio 1r. of Fig. 6 and the fragment that follows, i.e. *kān yurīdu ḥaratha* of verse 20 till *min al-dīni mā lam* of verse 21 like the simulated folio 1v. of Fig. 7. These simulations show clearly what must have happened. The leaf must have gotten loose and then was put back, but with the wrong side, the verso, first. With the second misplacement something else must have happened. The amount of text that was inserted, i.e. verse 47 *mā lakum min nakīrin* till verse 48 *fariḥa bihā*, is again more or less the same as on one side of the simulated folio (Fig. 8), but the amount of text which separates this insertion from the place where it should have been is approximately twice as long. This leads to the conclusion that instead of turning one page to go to the verso side of the leaf, the copyist must have turned two. After having copied the wrong verso page, he went back to the right page and recopied the last few words of the page before.

[10] See Whelan "Writing".

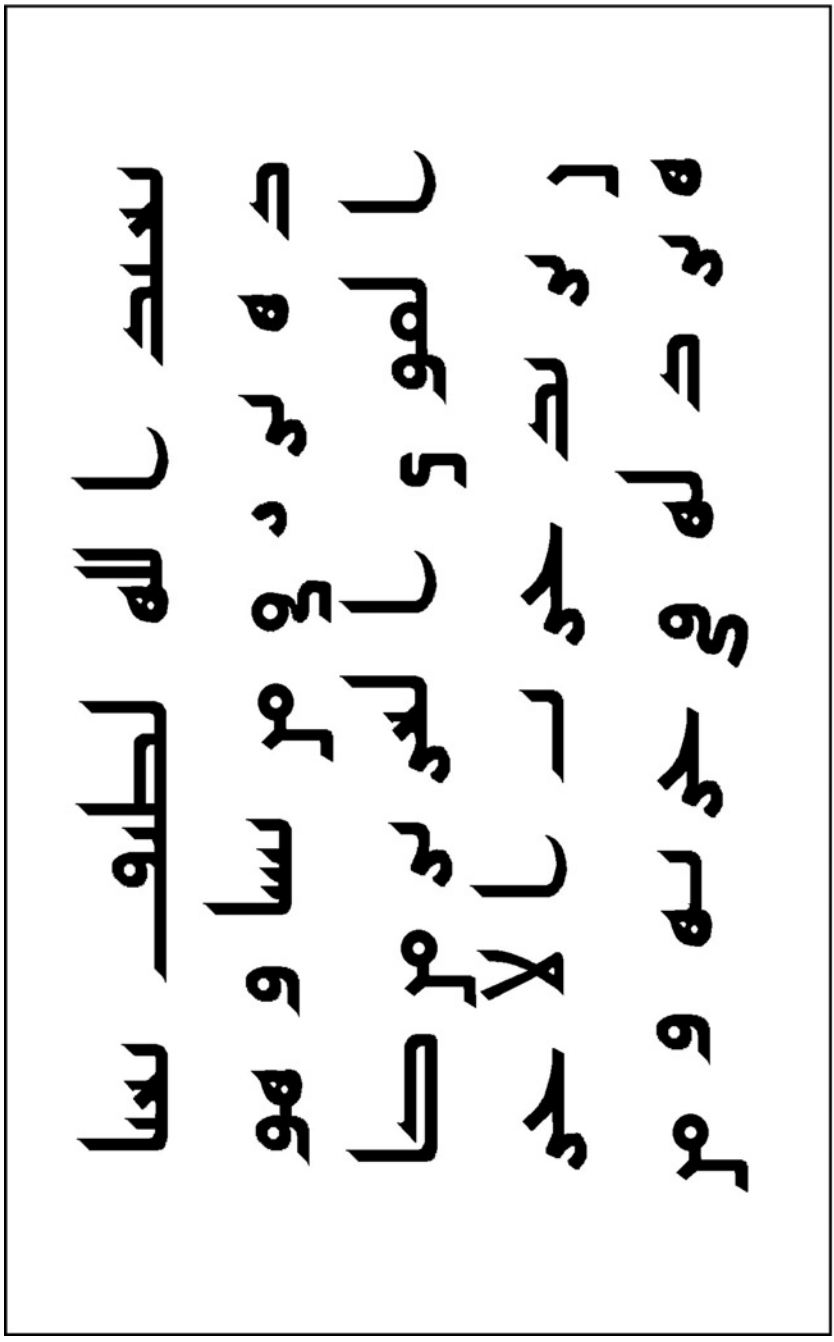


Fig. 6. Simulated folio 1r.

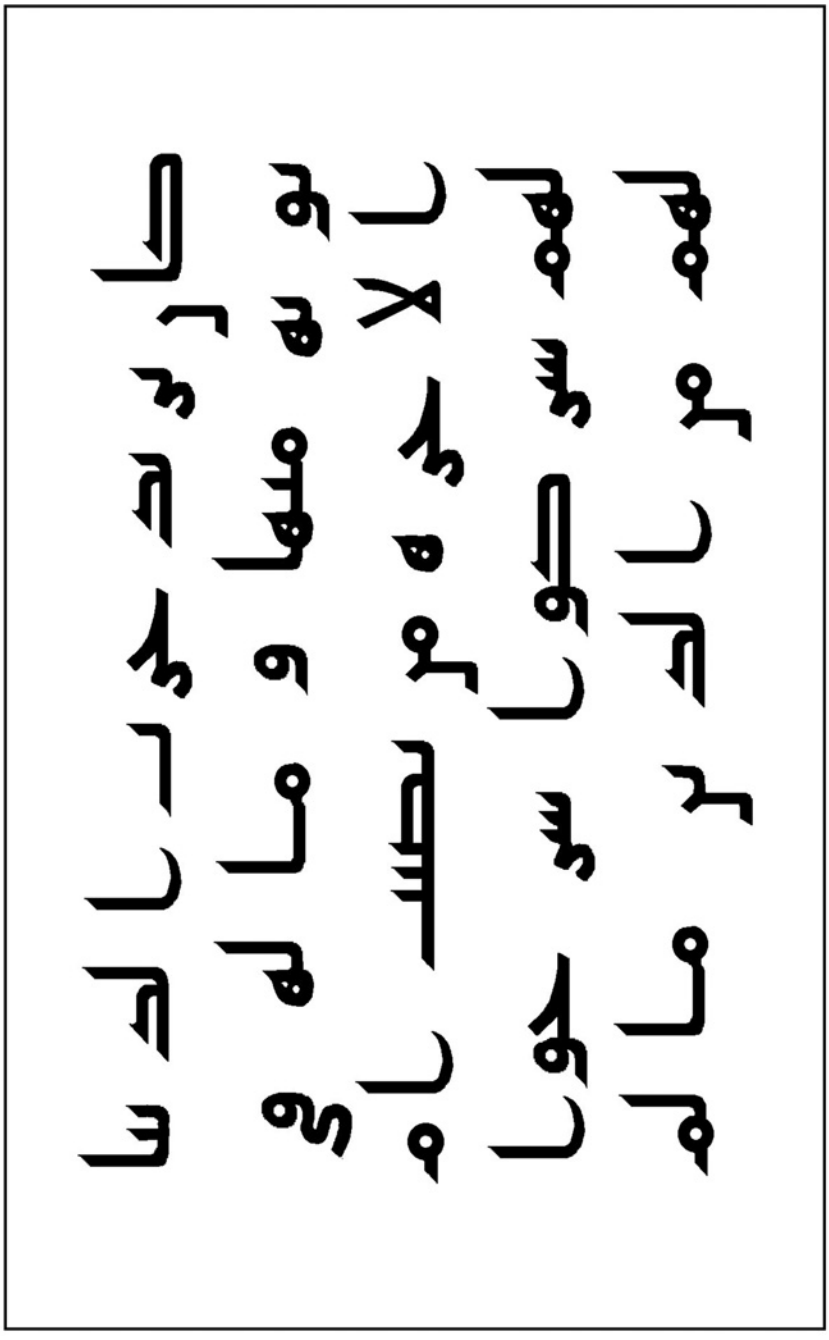


Fig. 7. Simulated folio 1v.

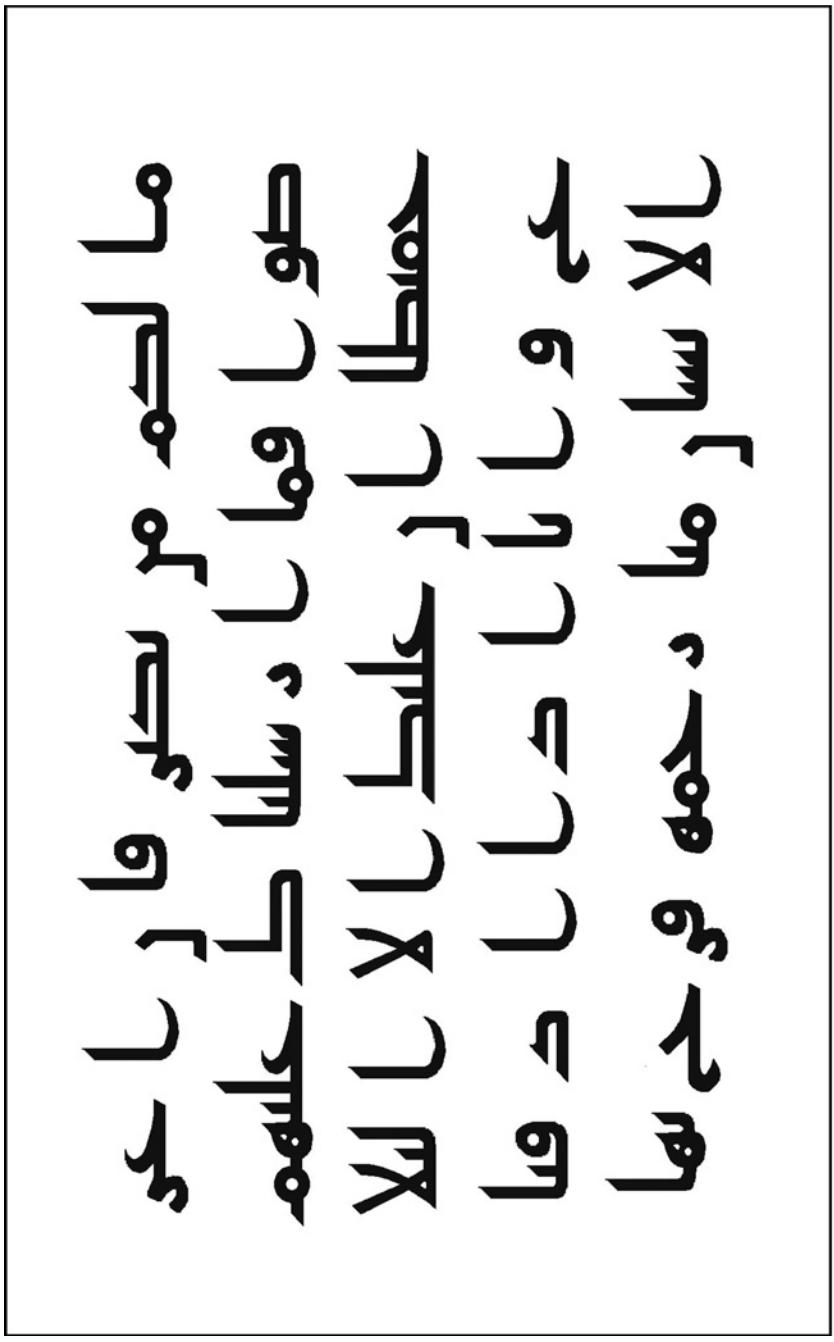


Fig. 8. Simulated folio 2v.

I think that the conclusion urges itself on us that the Qurʾānic fragment of folio 55r until 71r of the Groningen manuscript ukluHANDS 468 is a not very careful imitation of a part of an old Qurʾān manuscript. The carelessness in copying at least had the advantage that it enabled us to establish that Schroeder had been right. It was copied from something really old and venerable. Curious as it was, Tobias Krum's acquisition in Cairo must at the time not have been worth much more than its paper and ink. One just wonders, if it was prepared for the emerging market in Renaissance Europe. Were the opening words of the manuscript *lanā aʿmālunā wa-lakum aʿmālukum* (We have our deeds, and you have your deeds) written down with a bit of tongue in cheek? We do not know, but, nearly four centuries later, it remains a very peculiar Qurʾān manuscript.

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